

THE MEASURE

A JOURNAL OF POETRY



My Street — — — — by Isadore Schneider

Sisters in Love — — by Genevieve Taggard

The Enchanted Mesa — by Glenn Ward Dresbach

\$2.50 by the Year — — — — — Single Copies 25c

Published Monthly at 449 West 22nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Number 11 — — — — — January, 1922

Entered as second-class matter February 26, 1921, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879

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Number 11

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My Street

A sonnet sequence of East Side New York

I. THE HOUSES

THE twenty houses on my street look down
Upon its life with insufficient eyes;
Like aged dogs they watch with meek surprise,
Or like old women drawing up a gown
They shrink up narrowly upon brick walls;
Their yellow coping tears like eaten lace,
Their roofs are bowed like heads renouncing place,
Like a dejected arm each column falls.

The twenty houses on my street are old;
They warm their humbled bodies in the sun.
Sometimes their weary windows lean and scold
The intruding life that interrupts their peace.
With patient eyes they seek oblivion
Folding their doorways in content release.

II. THE GUTTER

YOUR gray abandon whirls you like a flood.
Within you children, leaping bathers, ride
Your mottled surf of garbage, your strewn wood
Eddying together like flotsam in a tide.
The pushcarts hinge like oysters to the curb,
The vocal autos glide like smooth, swift fish,
The wagons plod too careful to disturb
These supple tongues with ancients' gibberish.

At night your dark waves roll beside our door,
Floods shadowy and silent and suspect,
And each lit window of a neighbor store
Shudders apart and seems to recollect
Strayed ships, lost men, and glitter-lighted shore,
Where slatternly sirens mumble and reflect.

III. THE LAMPPOSTS

THE monkey boys try out their slipper legs
Around your smooth trunks and upon your branch.
They see you eye to eye and your lights blanch
Before their ardor, taking as it begs.
No, you're no tall trees, each with a single bird
Preening before us a red and yellow wing;
And you're no bright locked shepherds here that bring
Slant crooks of light to gather in the herd.

While with hard feet and clamoring of doors
Life irks your patient silence with strewn speech,
Your eight green posts in docile facing fours
All hold their bubble faces out of reach
And like one-minded, heedless auditors
Commune in muted whispers, each to each.

IV. THE PEOPLE

THE old men let their faces run into
Their keen gray beards that jostle on their chests;
Examplimg the ancient patience of the Jew
They walk the paces of their broken rests.
Drab women bright with children give to view
The white, fat, folded curvets of their breasts,
Or market-eyed with haggling jaws they shrew,
Their visages annulled beneath shawled crests.

Their small, limp husbands shoulder-bowed or paunched,
Sidling their home-way through the huddled street,
Bring wounds of weariness not too early staunched
With kissing children, who on glutted feet,
By placid wives from all the doorways launched,
Make their bare day ends populous and sweet.

V. EMPTY LOT

YOUR patient nudity is like a rump.
The sheds and fences, fallen from the street,
Like loosened clothing draggle toward your feet;
Like pocket flaps they pad you, thump by thump.
Your sharp, blank sides of stones are like white scabs
That no rain heals or scratching of the wind;
Like armpit hair your grass, abject and thinned,
Shows furtive in retreat beneath their slabs.

Now all the things that stub you with vain heels
Like blank, exploring dogs, or spattering wheels,
Lay on you casual indignities.
Even the all-humiliating skies
Reserve you for exceptional ordeals,
While you endure all day with barren eyes.

VI. THE BEGGAR AND THE VENDOR

HOLDING a worn out misery in his face
Which age has tied with wrinkles as with strings,
He stops the passersby as one who brings
The right to pity and attendant grace.
Across the gutter which divides domain
The vendor sits with baskets on his knee,
Straightening out his tattered dignity,
And eyes the beggar with content disdain.

The street is heedless; their contention goes
Through unwatched daily campaigns of cold eyes;
The same rain sucks them, and with equal snows
The wind attires them from evenly shared skies;
And people with a balanced shrug disclose
That they are taken for compact allies.

VII. SUNSET

THE houses are ingenious filigree
Of the tall frame that arches its caress.
The street wipes its old mirrors till they see
This splendor that atones for sordidness,—
A drama played upon a captured sky:
The old recurrent passion of the sun,
Too vast that it be ended or begun
Within the measure of the watching eye.

All that the street remembers of grand things
Between the wrench of day and stamp of night
(The futile dawns are lost where no cock sings)
Are these too sudden gestures of the light,
Which call to it, with urgent beckonings,
Full with vague mutinies that they incite.

Isadore Schneider

Lucifer

THE king of hell came singing
Down through the wolds of the world;
I heard his harness ringing
And his vorted lightning hurled;
He moved like cloud on the midnight
And struck like a storm unfurled.

My names, he sang, are Lucifer
And youth and the devil-in-man;
They have called me rebel, fire-bringer,
I am read out of heart and clan—
But the mornings of all the years are mine
To take them when I can.

Your graybeard gods whisper and darken,
Binding with oath and spell;
I have not heard them; I will not hearken;
They have no power over hell;
They are but Lucifers grown older,
Deeming what is is well.

Yet though I trample them down in thunder
And my treason is law and my fame
Be as the gods', still from under
Beats white hell in flame—
And my son Prometheus shall rise against me
Armored, bearing my name.

Maxwell Anderson

Landscape

THERE are clouds blown white and full,
Low hills,
And children with full blown dresses
Like tiny clouds,
Dancing.

David Greenhood

Sisters in Love

LITTLE HAMLET

OVER you, over you, over,
I hang like a wave, like a lover,
Like a scimitar edged with hate;
Too heavy with grief to be straight
And far
Too frail to ever discover
How to fall like a wave or a lover—
Or a blue-thin scimitar.

BEACH CABIN

I DREAMED you were the sea,
I dreamed you pounded
With foamy fists, the sad face of the shore.
Waking, I lay beneath you,
And the room resounded
With the hoarse fury of the mounting ocean's roar.

ANGULAR

OTHER hearts have broken gracefully, for your sake,
And now your eyes reproach me that my ache
Is awkward, and my arms
Are angular across my breast
Where emptiness is pressed.

SPRING TOUCH

HOW tender-mad the little meadows lie!
The wobbling lambs are tasting milky weeds,
The tipsy trees
Are leaned like foam on green, wind-gullied seas;
The pale moth flutters where the pale moth leads;
And you, swimming the sky
Waist-deep in surf of apple blossoms—I
Sweet to your thigh
Take the new tingle of your froth of seeds.

THE LONG MAGIC

SWING, swing, and swoon,
Morning, evening, noon,

And with night, sleep.

If you must, weep—
But here, here with me.

Swing like the sea
Where waves are tall;
Torrents and the three
Tides fall. . . .

Let the end be
With the last sweep:
Swoon, swoon with me—
Then sleep.

Genevieve Taggard

Your Halo

THE dainty shimmer of your old-gold hair,—
How like a halo does it change and glow!
How like a halo does it shine, as though
You were indeed Madonna! Is it fair

To be Madonna and yet free from care?
A Hoyden with a halo? Ah, but slow
The years will steal it from you! Let it glow!
Madonnas such as you, my dear, are rare!

Are you Madonna? Let me see your eyes!
Your halo makes the evening golden-bright.
Or are you Hoyden, wild and worldly-wise?
Your halo sheds its beautiful dim light.
Hoyden,—Madonna,—sweet in either guise,—
Your halo makes a glory of the night.

David P. Berenberg

The Enchanted Mesa

I.

THIS mesa is a vast block, stone and sand,
Left by a child-god in a greater play
Of blocks than we are given to understand.
From these bare walls the dazed sands stretch away
To meet blue ridges trailing through the haze
Memorial splendors of chaotic days.

Was this dropped on a shore of molten sea
That cooled and dried and left the block stand bare?
These sands are dried sea-beds where dizzily
Once comets rained from flame-bewildered air. . .
And, since we give known names to things unknown,
We named from awe this lofty block of stone.

II.

Enchanted mesa, fortress rising gray
Against the seasons where I walk the sand,
Great dock-breast where has tossed the rainbow spray
Of dawns and sunsets of this primal land,
I touch your walls. My hands are undismayed.
O child-god's toy, with me old gods have played.

The seasons cannot enter you. They sweep
Through me as wind through grass upon a hill.
They sway me to their moods, and they will keep
My driven dust. You are forever still.
A child-god played with you. . . . You feel no touch.
But gods played more with me. I feel too much.

The dawns and sunsets drop their loosened hair
Of flame upon your breast and it is cold.
My breast has flamed to things that cannot care—
A child-god played with you. My gods are old.
They filled me with the passions they have lost
In these changed days—and let me pay the cost.

Your beauty that you cannot see, I see.

Your beauty that I cannot take, you keep.

The power that is still in you in me

Stirs life that wears me down at last to sleep.

Only a child-god with great dreamy eyes

Has played with you. . . . Now gods are old and wise.

III.

The savage children of another time

Learned how to reach the wind-swept top

Of this enchanted mesa, and the climb

Gave vantage points of war from which to drop

Great rocks upon their foes. . . . The foes are gone.

Gone are the victors. On the top remain

The water-pits dug deep to catch the rain

For times of siege. And pottery upon

The hearth of sand is broken into bits,

And here and there an arrowhead misfits

In level sand. . . . Weak Indians of today

Whisper of evil spirits here. The sway

Of magic holds the place. No tribe may find

The hands that pound the war-drums of the wind,

Nor hands that build the signal fires that flare

In ghost-flames faint across the twilight air.

IV.

Beauty is here. The majesty

Of the sheer rock walls lifting

Is good for mortal man to see,

Touched with these shadows and these splendors

Drifting—drifting

Into the hazes of infinity. . . .

But it is beauty that has hurt for one

Who would feel intimately

The friendliness of grass and tree
And stream once known in a less passionate sun.
It is the beauty of no single thing—
Mesa and sky and distance make the whole
If one who comes to look on it will bring
The bared strength and the longing of a soul.
It is not kind and soothing to a sense
Of the few senses to which flesh is heir.
It is enchantment from the imminence
Of skies, and hazes that the mountains wear.
And call it evil or know that it is good,
It is but felt and seen—not understood.

Glenn Ward Dresbach

Question

THESE gold leaves—
were the leaves in Lesbos more gold?
Were they brighter gold?

And the winds coming upon Chios—
did they bend more softly
remembering Sumerian maidens?

Oh, cloud-white breast!
Beat softly here in my arms—

Were the feet of ecstasy more swift
in the tinkling gardens
of Amorgos?

Henry Bellamann

Now Is Purple

NOW is purple,
and a strange shrillness
of yellow—
yellow like very young green.

Why does October wear hues
of April?
Are not her eyes smoky
with memory?
Is not the odor of death
acid upon her?

Distilled remembrances
clustered in the dark pools
of her eyes—
are they not better than dreams?

Has spring such warm breasts?
Is not her brown savage mouth
sweet like late honey—
honey of golden-rod and nettles?

Has spring such sweet honey?
Henry Bellamann

These Two

HIS flesh is white velvet,
And his, brown leather;
I shall tear the white velvet
And fashion me
A wanton gown
In which to dance before the world.
But of the brown leather
I shall build me a pair of boots
In which to walk.

Pauline Cahn

Ah Gabriel—

IF it should happen now, if a woman named Mary,
Bending to the weeds in her rose and rosemary bed,
Should see a flaming shadow fall, should hear a scary
Whirring in the apple tree above her head,

And rising up should find you, leaning on a lily,
I think she would not speak at all, she would only stare,
Wondering how a grown man could ever be so silly
As to have a golden hat and long curled hair.

And when your voice so singingly said "Mary, Mary,"
"I have come to tell you—" she would never understand
Your mission or your message, but feeling very wary,
Wave you from her garden with imperious hand.

Though, when you left, the sunset would glimmer stronger,
As feathers from your wings floated tinily clear,
She would only think, "Days are still getting longer,"
Or, "My, but the fireflies are thick this year!"

I know she would not know an angel from a fairy,
Or recognize light save in the smoky lamp
She sets to shine for Joseph plodding home to his Mary,
Or believe that golden Gabriel was not a grey tramp.
Winifred Welles

First Love

A DISH of honey. . . .
Roses freshly washed by rain. . . .
The stars are very bright, the stars are bright!
The wind stirs the wistaria against the window pane. . . .
The river hurries, all its eddies swirl,
I am adrift, I am borne on a far sweep of water, I am borne out . . . out . . .
O my beloved, let me take your hand
And I shall dare to clutch my joy! I shall not doubt!

Orestes Trueblood

The Measure *&* A Journal of Poetry

Published monthly by the Editors at 449 West 22nd St., N. Y.

Edited by Maxwell Anderson, Padraic Colum, Carolyn Hall, Frank Ernest Hill, Louise Townsend Nicholl, George O'Neil, Pitts Sanborn, Genevieve Taggard. From these eight an acting editor and an assistant are elected quarterly by the board.

Associate Editors—Hervey Allen, Joseph Auslander, Robert Hillyer and David Morton.

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Seed of Renaissance

THE most important thing about the Anthology of Magazine Verse for 1921 is not a number of regrettable typographical errors or the inclusion of many poems which should have been omitted. One would like to turn the pages of Mr. Braithwaite's book without seeing a single poem on Keats. It is indeed the one hundredth anniversary of the poet's death, but what is that fact beside the more important one that there were no distinctive poems on Keats published in American magazines last year? Just criticism could be offered on other material in the anthology. But anthology makers should be pardoned for including a certain amount of rubbish if they also gather all the available gold and jewels. Mr. Braithwaite seems to have done this.

The representative collection which is the result has rather more significance than usual. Six years ago we thought we were in a poetic renaissance. Lately we have not been sure of it. The anthology indicates that whatever may have been the immediate value of the poetic activity begun half a dozen years ago, it has at least begotten vigorous heirs.

Not that the leaders of 1915 have themselves disappeared. Though some have graduated from magazine into volume verse, Mr. Frost, Miss Lowell, Mr. Benét, Mr. Robinson, H. D., and Sara Teasdale are represented, some of them by excellent work. But these leaders no longer dominate the anthology as they once did. The memorable pieces of the 1921 collection are not by the older poets. The crystal and bronze of

Miss Wylie's lyrics, the sweep and humanity and descriptive brilliance of Lew Sarett's *Box of God*, the swift singing quality of Genevieve Taggard's "Ice Age," the subdued but tenacious cadences of Hazel Hall's short poems move one most.

The "renaissance" of a few years ago may not have come—may never come—to any brilliant flowering. It has already scattered seed.

Frank Ernest Hill

Brutus Roams the Ages

The Open Sea, by Edgar Lee Masters. The Macmillan Company, New York.

BRUTUS would be a more satisfactory name for this book, dominated as it is by the succession of monologues and scenes called *Brutus* which take the book's first half in tracing a vein of fanatical zealotism through the years from Brutus's murder of Caesar to the burial from an insane asylum of Boston Corbett, killer of John Wilkes Booth. The evil that men do lives after them Mr. Masters believes particularly and disastrously true in the case of Brutus, who lived again some nineteen hundred years later in the person of another of the "madmen of the centuries," unbalanced by the liberty idea, the murderer of Lincoln.

With rather deft though ponderous touch upon the keynotes of widely separated generations, Mr. Masters gives us something very like a chord. The final, extra note of Boston Corbett, twisted and grotesque, is not so much a resolution as a transition, a beginning. Fanatics, killing life for an idea and thus the idea itself, will go on forever, in absurdity and pathos as well as seeming grandeur, Boston Corbett seems to say. There must be always Brutuses. As Leonard Digges, speaking at the Mermaid Tavern on April 10, 1613, concerning Shakespeare's error in over-estimating Brutus, says:

Why make a man as great as Nature can
The gods will raise a manikin to kill him,
And over-turn the order that he founds.
A grape-seed strangles Sophocles, a turtle
Falls from an eagle's claws on Aeschylus,
And cracks his shiny pate.

Lucilius, in the beginning, talks at a feast given to Aristocrats in Rome, of the difference between Brutus, the fanatic, and Antony, the lover of life, the essentially sane man. Yet who will follow Antony?

. . . Why, never a soul!
These things are done by souls who do not think,
But act from feeling. But those mad for stars
Glimpsed in wild waters or through mountain mists
Seen ruddy and portentous will take Brutus
As inspiration, since for Virtue's sake
And for the good of Rome he killed his friend;
And in the act made Liberty as far
From things of self, as murder is apart
From friendship and its ways.

Leonard Digges talks next. Then there is a scene of Charlotte Corday's trial, July 17, 1793, for the murder of Marat, in which she quotes Brutus as her chief inspiration. Little Abraham Lincoln gets born, a neighbor woman acting as nurse being the narrator. Richard Booth in London in 1813, begging his son Junius Brutus not to be an actor but to carry out his own lifelong ambitions to work for liberty, tells of his attempted escape from England when a boy to fight against his country in the American Revolution, and how John Wilkes, to whom he had applied for help, had told his father of it and helped to bring him home. Wilkes, being a fighter for freedom himself, says Richard Booth, knew too well the agonies of those who work for liberty against the world to let an untried boy start upon that road.

Then John Wilkes Booth, son of Junius Brutus Booth, the actor, is born. The story goes, alternating now between Booth and Lincoln lore, through the decision of Lincoln for war, and the refusal of Booth to longer play the part of Antony to his brother's Brutus, or any other part, since his brother had voted for Lincoln. The assassination is given, and Booth's capture and killing.

It is an ambitious and well-done piece of work. Like all of Masters's writing, it has ideas, mind, research, behind it. But, as to its being poetry, in the main it is not. Is it barely possible that Masters sacrifices art, as Brutus sacrifices life, to an idea? A convincing thesis, oratory in regular lines, a series of metrical monologues and dialogues, a valuable contribution, it is; but not poetry, not even rhythmic prose.

It is too bad that Mr. Masters did not save out his *The New Apocrypha*, second part of the book, to be supplemented and made into a book of its own. Some of these are delightful bits of half-light verse concerned with the material disadvantages of early Christianity, the other side of the coin of miracle. The man into whose hogs the evil spirits were deposited, the fish and bread men whose wares were suddenly superfluous, and others, are the heretofore unconsidered heroes of these tales.

Louise Townsend Nicholl

Nets to Catch the Wind

Nets to Catch the Wind, by Elinor Wylie. New York; Harcourt, Brace and Company.

ELINOR WYLIE goes back to Blake on the other side of the water and to Emily Dickinson on this side for her ideals of craftsmanship and beauty. But she is an authentic artist herself, quite worthy to name with either of those predecessors. Indeed, she is already a cut above Emily Dickinson as a poet, and though she has written no single lyric equal to Blake's best she has to her credit a larger number of pieces likely to pass current than that puzzling mystic happened to evolve. Miss Wylie's poems are not accidental. She knows what she wants to do and does it with surprising mastery of form and concept.

Her candles burn, almost invariably, with bright, light, clear flame. Her weapons are rapier and dagger, not carried under a cloak and wielded in the shadows, but flashed blindingly in sunlight. Her most successful poems strike the eye like spires at sunrise. She speaks as a fairy should dance, fancifully, with a mocking, restrained madness. She loves mankind least in all the animal kingdom, preferring the tortoise, the eagle, the mole.

A few of the titles in her slim book are less pointed and magical than the others, yet as a whole it is on a level both high and securely kept. Like Edna Millay she affects the youthful idiom somewhat, but like Miss Millay again she does it with a grace that is its own excuse. It is a hopeful sign that the least youthful poem in this collection is also the best, or one of the best. *Bronze Trumpets and Sea Water—On Turning Latin into English* could not be improved. Since it has been marred by a misprint in the line next to the last in at least three printings I quote it:

Alembics turn to stranger things
Strange things, but never while we live
Shall magic turn this bronze that sings
To singing water in a sieve.

The trumpeters of Caesar's guard
Salute his vigorous bastions
With ordered bruit; the bronze is hard
Though there is silver in the bronze.

Our mutable tongue is like the sea,
Curled wave and shattering thunder-fit;
Dangle in strings of sand shall he
Who smooths the ripples out of it.

Maxwell Anderson

Contributors

ISADORE SCHNEIDER knows and has sung of many other things beside the East Side, but probably he never has sung better than on this subject, —a subject nobody, we think, has handled so well. Mr. Schneider is a New Yorker and a journalist.

DAVID GREENHOOD is a graduate of the University of California and lives at Berkeley, California.

DAVID BERENBERG, in addition to being a poet, is an instructor at the Rand School, an accountant, a writer on labor subjects, and a resident of Brooklyn.

GLENN WARD DRESBACH, who has been in the southwest for some time, is the author of several volumes of poems. His next book, *In Colours of the West*, will be out this spring.

HENRY BELLAMANN is a musician and a teacher of music living in Columbia, N. C.

PAULINE CAHN is a young New York City poet.

WINIFRED WELLES, author of *The Hesitant Heart*, is known to the readers of *The Measure* through other poems than *Ah Gabriel*.

ORESTES TRUEBLOOD is the pseudonym of a young California poet.

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PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY

THE EDITORS

at

449 West 22nd Street, New York City

Subscription \$2.50 a year

Single copies 25 cents

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